



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

MODERN LANGUAGE NOTES.

Baltimore, June, 1889.

CRITICS AND CRITICISM.

Whatever may be the commercial or industrial tendencies of the day, we are living in an age of unwonted mental activity, such activity expressing itself in no province more fully than in the educational and literary. Books are multiplying at such a rapid rate that publishers and readers alike are puzzled to know how to keep even pace with their ever increasing production. In all this there is, of necessity, a constantly accumulating amount of subject-matter for the inspection of the critic. Whether or not schools of criticism exist among us, as they do in Continental Europe, criticism itself exists, on the common principle of supply and demand, and varies in its type and method as the age in which it finds expression differs from ages preceding. Among all cultivated people, criticism, whether philosophic, scientific or literary, may be said to have had its well established canons. It is agreed, on all sides, that ability, insight, conscience and courage are needed to secure anything like satisfactory results in such a sphere of endeavor. It is not our purpose, at present, to enlarge upon these essentials. This we have done sufficiently fully elsewhere.* Our immediate purpose is, to call attention to a few of those dangerous tendencies that beset the critic as he applies himself to his legitimate work and which appear to us to be increasingly potent within the province of literary art.

We notice, first, the tendency to *dogmatism*. The name of the forms which this dogmatic temper may take is Legion. Sometimes, it assumes the guise of arrogance, a haughty disdain of all that lies below the level of its own pretension; at times, it assumes the phase of an independent love of the truth, a fearless defence and diffusion of opinion, in the face of all opposing influences; still again, purposely or unwittingly, it passes the bounds of all scholarly propriety, in a pronounced assertion of the cynical and censorious, seeking by "the scorn of scorn" to make itself felt where

**New Princeton Review*, July, 1887.

more considerate methods would fail. Whatever its form, it is dogmatism, out and out. From first to last, it is authoritative, entertaining no appeal from its deliverances but insisting upon their validity as final. Of such a spirit VOLTAIRE was a signal exponent. Even so worthy a French critic as MR. TAINÉ far too frequently exhibits it, especially in his review of English authorship, while no American censor has gone to more revolting lengths in this direction and with less warrant than did EDGAR ALLEN POE. The fact is, that criticism as an art requires, at this point, a high type of conscience and character properly to execute its functions. The critic, by his very attitude and office, is supposed to know more of the subject upon which he sits in judgment than the author himself knows and, if he really does, it is, perhaps, too much to ask of human nature that he should even attempt to conceal from his readers his consciousness of it. Pride of opinion is, perchance, too potent a factor in the mental personality of most men to be thus held in abeyance, especially when there is a kind of justifiable occasion for its expression on the part of the critic. Hence it is, that no higher quality exists in a critic's character than intellectual humility; insisting, at the very moment of passing judicial opinion upon the labors of his fellows, that he himself is open to error and must, in turn, become the proper object of his brother's scrutiny and possible rebuke. Nowhere does dogmatism more thoroughly overreach itself than in the sphere of literary criticism, whereby the best ends of such criticism are defeated in the assumption of infallibility by the critic. The more a man knows, the less he should think he knows. The more pronounced a man's mental progress is, the more pronounced should be the growth of intellectual modesty, and no man should be less arrogant in his official work than he whose very office makes it easy for him to be arrogant.

We notice, further, a tendency to *excessive minuteness of method*. Reference is here made to the order of the criticism rather than to the spirit of the critic,—to a prevailing critical procedure that may deprive it of some of

its most attractive features and make it less and less effective. Such minuteness insists, at all hazards, upon the technical, textual, verbal and formal. It insists upon the mechanism of criticism; upon a close and an ever closer examination of clause and phrase; of particles and parentheses; of vowels and consonants; of colons and semicolons; of the dicta of the schools and the literary formulae laid down by the authorities. All this is well and has its place, and cannot be safely ignored by any one who pretends to interpret aright the authorship submitted to him. There is, however, a something more and better than this and so much better as always, in case of conflict of claims, to take precedence. There is such a thing in authorship as the thought behind the word and between the lines, governing the word and line. There is a thinker behind the thought, controlling and shaping the thought. There is such a factor in literature as personality, amenable to literary statute and, yet, quite above it, and so much above it as never to be forced to surrender its place and office. There is such a thing as nature working within the domain of art and, yet, its acknowledged superior. There are times when precepts, formulated never so nicely, must give way to generic principles, even though somewhat crudely expressed; when details must yield to generalizations; grammar, to sense; and the restrictions of technical correctness, to the unrestrained deliverances of genius. We are speaking of criticism as applied in style and letters rather than in the sphere of linguistics proper, where there is a verbal and structural accuracy needed that is not needed elsewhere. Of the philological critic, the staple of whose study is grammar, idiom and text, it is more naturally expected that he hold himself more rigidly to the letter and the line. As in the great mediæval controversy between Romanist and Arian, valid distinctions may turn upon the use or omission of a diphthong. Even here, however, an extreme minuteness may frustrate its own aims by dealing with manuscripts and texts as if they were, indeed, dead, quite devoid of mental vitality and thus especially capable of microscopic analysis. If MÜLLER is even approxi-

mately correct in his recently reiterated views as to thought and language, there is something more required of the linguistic critic than mere verbal correctness, and that something more will oblige him, at times, to subject the letter to the spirit. We submit, that textual criticism has already gone to dangerous limits in this direction, so that not a few of our philologists have reduced their editorial work to a fastidious search after an accuracy that cannot be reached, while in the search they have quite ignored the innermost meaning and motive of the original.

In the sphere of style, however, there can be no question but that this order of criticism, under the plausible name of advanced scholarship, has been pushed to an injurious extreme. We are not to discard the "Winter's Tale" because Bohemia is placed on the coast, nor unduly depreciate the "Two Gentlemen of Verona" because Verona and Milan are more than once confounded. When we are told "that about geography SHAKESPEARE knew little and cared less," we are not to infer that geography is of no value in dramatic verse, but we are to infer that there are some things more valuable. The Shakespearian order of genius cannot always be limited to the visible and local, and yet most Shakespearian critics still insist in defining the area within which his spacious powers must move. "I must also observe with Longinus," says ADDISON, "that the productions of a great genius, with many lapses and inadvertences, are infinitely preferable to the works of an inferior kind of authors which are scrupulously exact and conformable to all the rules of correct writing." The servile German critics who vainly endeavored to reduce the genius of GOETHE and SCHILLER to the level of their methods, were of this objectionable order, as was the school of BOILEAU in France. Much of the critical procedure of Augustan English suffered at this point, while we have not to look beyond the England of to-day to note the existence and growing prevalence of this "mundane" school of technique. MATTHEW ARNOLD had his faults as a critic, but they were not here. Aesthetic in his work and exquisitely artistic, he always insisted that there was a soul in authorship, and that literary

form itself depended on a literary spirit beneath it.

We notice, finally, a tendency to the erection of *unduly exalted critical standards*. There is such a thing as "the despotism of the ideal;" as the holding of so high a model as to discourage, if not destroy, all effort. ADDISON, in his criticism of 'Paradise Lost,' is at pains to admit, at the outset, that there are spots in the sun. There is a valid sense in which it is the part of an ingenuous critic not to see too much. Here, we touch again upon the besetting sin of the critic, that of pride of opinion, whereby he is led so to magnify his office as to make it impossible for authors to meet his imperious demands. The first article in the creed of the critic must be his confession of faith in human fallibility. Approximate results along the lines of literary effort are all that can be expected, and sweeping condemnation should be withheld in the presence of substantial merit and the promise of still better results. We are speaking of the tyrannical exactions of much of our criticism; of the undue application of "executive severity;" of requisites demanded by the critic to which he himself has never been able to conform and for the realization of which he has at present no right to look. Strange to say, these exorbitant conditions are often made with special emphasis by those who have the least claim to make them—by the younger censors of the day. It is somewhat in the line of the serio-comic to mark the attitude assumed by such self-appointed novices, as they sit in judgment upon their elders and mental and literary superiors. Still, they pose as critics; lay down the law in its entirety; mercilessly rule out any concessions to human limitations, and insist that all be done as "nominated in the bond." Even old DOCTOR JOHNSON, autocrat that he was, failed to go as far as this, while such technical critics as DRYDEN and POPE always postulated a degree of error on the part of the wisest. A critic, to succeed, need not show that the subject of his criticism is totally incompetent. Criticism is, after all, constructive. In fine, we are dealing, here, with the very essence of hyper-criticism, as dogmatic, facetious and exacting. It is a phase of the "higher criticism" of the

day, outside of theology. There are critics and there are critics. There is a measure of personal independence of judgment germane to the critic's function, but it need not pass over into offensive assertion. There is a degree of accuracy of detail involved in the very idea of criticism as a science, but it need not become an end in itself. There must be, in all judicial procedure in the sphere of letters, a standard sufficiently high to excite the best ambitions, but it need not lie within the region of the superhuman.

Despite all dogmatism, mechanical detail and exaction, there are some books and authors that have stood all legitimate tests, and are, as we confess, above criticism. It is quite too late for the most sagacious among us to subject DANTE and SHAKESPEARE to a new examination with the possible result of classifying them with MARINI, POLLOCK and TUPPER.

In a word, literary criticism is a vital part of literature itself and not an extraneous science looking in upon authorship from the outside as if it were a something merely for the official examination of the inspector. The unnatural severance of these two things is a growing grievance among us, nor can a more timely service be done for each of them, at present, than the emphasis of their mutual influence and co-operative working in the one wide department of letters to which they belong. Authors and critics must have common aims and interests; must confer and legislate and act in the spirit of amity; must interchange, at times, their respective functions, and together seek, throughout their work, the same beneficent results in the sphere of style and literary art.

T. W. HUNT.

Princeton College.

FÖRSTERS 'CHEVALIER AU LION' AND THE MABINOGI.

Every student of the Round Table Romances will feel a debt of gratitude to WENDELIN FÖRSTER for his beautiful and careful edition of 'Christian of Troyes,' and there are probably few who will presume to criticize his work in normalizing the text, or the correctness of his judgments regarding the relation